

**Testimony of Andrea Cohen Kiener, on behalf of Interreligious Eco-Justice Network**

**March 1, 2010**

**Committee on the Environment**

**HB 5126 AA Establishing a Chemical Innovations Institute and the University of Connecticut**

These are two important bills. The documented variety and concentration of toxic exposures each of us has is truly alarming. Because these exposures are minute and spread out over time – the dread that we should feel – the urgency we should work from – are absent. Over a lifetime, we have responses to these exposures which range from infertility and birth defects to asthma and mood disorders and no one can draw the straight line and point to this shampoo is the cause, this chemical in my rug is the cause. The exposures are diffuse and the consequences are attenuated. But my sense of urgency is real.

I have a daughter with infertility problems and I myself suffer from breast cancer and asthma. In many of the products I choose or need to buy, I am exposed again and again to solvents and fumes of various kinds. I have congregants who live in a bubble environment in their homes because their immune systems have been given out from all the toxins. No one is minding the store. Industry is not minding the store. Relevant state and federal enforcement laws are spread out over dozens of agencies – and many of the agency mandates are ridiculously inadequate for the task. The federal Toxic Substance Control Act addresses 4 chemicals out of the 19000 that are produced in excess of 1Mil tons a year.

I am excited about the proposal for an institute at UConn to research best practices for bringing the safest chemical alternatives to the market. The institute could use research developing in other states and forums. It can create an important technical and economic resource for UConn and the state. I think this institute can bridge the cultural gap between business and health advocates such as me. Their research and recommendations can serve businesses who do not wish to poison their customers but who have no guidance as to what is truly dangerous in their product line and which alternatives are safer.

**HB 5130 AAC Child Safe Products**

As for the children's safe products act, this is a logical compliment to the very important institute bill. We know what is truly harmful to a vulnerable class of citizens – our kids – and we need a mechanism to phase these materials out.

These bills are timely and useful. They put us in an excellent direction to have a healthy economic and environmental culture. I believe they will both be an asset to the state and a model.

I speak here more as a mom than as a religious leader – but I will add that 300 of our members have signed a statement on Christian Principles for a Healthy Body and a Healthy Spirit. Signers include members of the Catholic Church and Planned Parenthood. There is not much legislation out there that draws support from groups this diverse. Thank you for your support of these timely and important bills.